

Message Text

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R 191530Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2885

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SANA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TRIPOLI 0077

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT

SUBJECT: LIBYAN NATIONAL CONGRESS; BEDUIN THEATER

SUMMARY: ABOUT ONE THOUSAND SUPPORTERS OF THE REGIME MET IN A
SORT OF MARATHON BEDUIN TOWN MEETING IN TRIPOLI

JANUARY 5-18, UNDER THE AEGIS OF COLONEL QADHAFI. FROM THE
BEGINNING, QADHAFI DECLARED HIMSELF PRESIDENT OF THE
CONGRESS, AND GENERALLY RAN THINGS AS HE LIKED.

PRIME MINSTER JALLUD WAS ELECTED SECRETARY GENERAL,
BUT THE RCC AS A BODY WAS VISIBLY DOWNGRADED, WITH
QADHAFI OFTEN REFERRING TO HIMSELF AS CHIEF OF STATE.

DESPITE ATTEMPTS TO PREVENT A REPETITION OF THE CHAOTIC
SCENES WHICH PREVAILED ON PREVIOUS SUCH CONFERENCES, ORDER
FREQUENTLY BROKE DOWN; DEBATES WERE ABSURD BUT FRANK.

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CRITICISMS AND COMPLAINTS WHICH STOPPED SHORT OF

CHALLENGING QADHAFI'S AUTHORITY WERE ALLOWED AND EVEN ENCOURAGED. MOST OF THE CONGRESS TIME WAS DEVOTED TO INTERNAL MATTERS AND ECONOMIC POLICY, AND WHAT PUBLIC DISCUSSION THERE WAS ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUGGESTED THAT NO CHANGES WERE LIKELY. DURING THE CONFERENCE AND IN A CLOSING SPEECH QADHAFI BETRAYED HIS CONTINUED CONCERN OVER HIS UNEASY HOLD ON POWER. THE CONFERENCE WAS AN ATTEMPT BY QADHAFI TO GIVE HIS RULE AN APPEARANCE OF LEGITIMACY AND CONSENSUS, BUT THE EFFECT WAS MARRED BY STUDENT VIOLENCE IN BENGHAZI WHICH, NOT COINCIDENTALLY, ERUPTED THE DAY BEFORE IT BEGAN.
END SUMMARY.

1. FOR MONTHS QADHAFI HAS BEEN MAKING ELABORATE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONVENING OF A NATIONAL CONGRESS. HE FIRST ANNOUNCED THE IDEA IN APRIL, 1975, BUT PREPARATIONS DID NOT GO INTO HIGH GEAR UNTIL AFTER THE MUHAYSHI AFFAIR IN AUGUST. THE CONGRESS, QADHAFI PROCLAIMED, WOULD BECOME THE COUNTRY'S HIGHEST INSTANCE, RESPONSIBLE FOR DECLARING WAR, MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT GOVERNMENT SPENDING, AND IN GENERAL RUNNING THE COUNTRY. IT WOULD BE BIGGER AND BETTER THAN THE TWO ARAB SOCIALIST UNION CONFERENCES WHICH HAD PRECEDED IT, AND SHOW THE ONLY PATH TO DEMOCRACY TO THE REST OF THE WORLD. SO MUCH FOR THOSE WHO ACCUSED QADHAFI OF BEING A DICTATOR WHOSE POWER RESTED EXCLUSIVELY ON THE MILITARY, AND WHOSE RULE WAS INCREASINGLY UNPOPULAR. QADHAFI DEvised AN INTRICATE PROCESS FOR ELECTING DELEGATES, BASED ON A PYRAMIDAL STRUCTURE OF POPULAR CONGRESSES, POPULAR COMMITTEES, AND FEDERATIONS, MOST OF WHICH EXISTED CHIEFLY IN HIS IMAGINATION (FOR THE LARGELY IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE SCHEME, SEE TRIPOLI A-35 OF 1975), AND HIS INTIMIDATED AGENTS DID THEIR BEST TO CARRY OUT HIS INSTRUCTIONS TO THE LETTER, OFTEN WITH FARCICAL RESULTS. FINALLY, FOR BETTER OR WORSE, ABOUT ONE THOUSAND SUPPORTERS CONVENED IN TRIPOLI ON JANUARY 5 IN A BRAND NEW CONFERENCE CENTER, AND THE CONGRESS GOT UNDERWAY. AS A RESULT OF THE CONTROLLED OF THE SELECTION PROCESS, A DISPROPORTIONATE NUMBER OF DELEGATES WERE FROM THE OASES OF THE INTERIOR RATHER THAN THE CITIES
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OF THE COAST, REFLECTING QADHAFI'S OWN PRIORITIES.

2. FROM THE BEGINNING, QADHAFI LAID TO REST ANY IDEA THAT THE CONGRESS WOULD HAVE ANY REAL POWER, OR SHARE ANY OF HIS AUTHORITY. HE WOULD BE THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS, HE TOLD THE DELEGATES CASUALLY. THE "CONSTITUTIONAL PROCLAMATION" PLACING POWER IN THE HANDS OF THE RCC REMAINED IN

FORCE, AND "WE SHOULD NOT DO ANYTHING WHICH CONFLICTS WITH THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCLAMATION", HE SAID PRIMLY. THE CONGRESS, QADHAFI EXPLAINED, WAS ONLY THE HIGHEST "POPULAR" INSTANCE IN THE COUNTRY, NOT QUITE THE SAME THING AS THE HIGHEST EXECUTIVE INSTANCE, WHICH REMAINED THE RCC. DURING THE CONGRESS THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE DISCUSSION OF THESE CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS, BUT THE BASIC POSITION REMAINED AS QADHAFI HAS STATED IT AT THE BEGINNNING.

3. THE RCC IS DOWNGRADED:

THERE WAS AN OBVIOUS DIFFERENCE IN THE SETTING OF THIS CONGRESS FROM THE 1974 PARTY CONGRESS. IN 1974. QADHAFI HAD SHARED THE STAGE WITH HIS RCC COLLEAGUES, WHO SAT AT THE SAME TABLE WITH HIM ON EITHER SIDE. NOW QADHAFI WAS SPLENDIDLY ALONE IN THE CENTER OF THE STAGE. AT HIS RIGHT WAS A TABLE FOR THE CONGRESS SECRETARIAT, AND TO HIS LEFT AN EMPTY SEAT FOR THE SECRETARY GENERAL, YET TO BE SELECTED. THE REMAINING ACTIVE RCC MEMBERS, PRIME MINISTER JALLUD, MINISTER OF INTERIOR KHAWAYLKI AL-HUMAYDI, ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF ABU BAKR YUNIS, AND LT. COLONEL KHARRUBI, WERE

RELEGATED TO THE FRONT ROW OF THE AUDIENCE WITH THE CIVILIAN MINISTERS AND OTHER DELEGATES, FACING QADHAFI, A VERY VISIBLE LOSS OF STATUS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 TRIPOLI 0077

4. JALLUD CHOSEN SECRETARY GENERAL:

AN EARLY ITEM OF BUSINESS PUT TO THE CONFERENCE BY QADHAFI WAS THE SELECTION OF A SECRETARY GENERAL. THE FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE AUS HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO CARRY OUT HIS DUTIES, QADHAFI SAID (MAJOR BASHIR HAWWADI WAS IMPLICATED IN THE MUHAYSHI PLOT, AND IS REPORTEDLY UNDER HOUSE ARREST), AND OBVIOUSLY A NEW ONE WAS NEEDED. THE HEAD OF THE STUDENT FEDERATION PROPOSED THAT THE SECRETARY GENERAL BE ELECTED FROM AMONG THE DELEGATES, BUT THIS WAS NOT WHAT QADHAFI HAD IN MIND. THERE WAS ONLY ONE POSSIBLE CHOICE, QADHAFI EXPLAINED, FOR SECRETARY GENERAL. SINCE HE HAD TO BE SOMEONE WITH EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT THE DECISIONS OF THE CONGRESS: PRIME
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MINISTER JALLUD. THIS PROPOSAL WAS AGREED TO BY ACCLAMATION, BUT NOT BEFORE QADHAFI HAD EXPLAINED CAREFULLY THAT JALLUD WOULD BE TH SERVANT OF THE CONGRESS, NOT ITS MASTER, AND THAT JALLUD'S NEW TITLE WOULD NOT INCREASE HIS POWER OF AFFECT THE WAY THE COUNTRY IS GOVERNED.

5. DISCIPLINE AND ORDER:

PREVIOUS ASU CONGRESSES HAD BEEN MARKED BY CHAOS AND WILD SCENES, AND QADHAFI WAS ANXIOUS TO AVOID A REPETITION. ONLY FERVENT QADHAFI SUPPORTERS WERE IN THE HALL, AS A RESULT OF THE CAREFULLY MONITORED SELECTION PROCESS, AND THEY WERE WARNED FROM THE BEGINNING THAT STRICT RULES OF ORDER WOULD BE OBSERVED. AS IT TURNED OUT, WHILE THE CONGRESS WAS PERHAPS SLIGHTLY BETTER BEHAVED THAN THE PREVIOUS ONE, ORDER FREQUENTLY COLLAPSED ANYWAY. BOTH QADHAFI AND JALLUD FREQUENTLY LECTURED THE DELEGATES ON THEIR BEHAVIOR, BUT IT SEEMED TO HAVE LITTLE EFFECT. DEBATES WERE OFTEN RIDICULOUS. AT THE SAME TIME, AS QADHAFI AND OTHERS ENJOYED POINTING OUT,

THERE WAS A REMARKABLE FREEDOM TO THE MEETINGS. DELEGATES CRITICIZED EVERYTHING BUT QADHAFI'S AUTHORITY, AND HE OFTEN ENCOURAGED THIS. MINISTERS WERE CALLED TO ACCOUNT AND OPENLY CRITICIZED. AT ONE POINT, AFTER THE UNDER-SECRETARY OF THE PLANNING MINISTRY AHD TRIED TO EZPLAIN ONE PROGRAM (WATER DRILLING) QADHAFI TOLD HIM BLUNTLY: "WHAT ALL THAT COMES DOWN TO IS THAT YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT IJG." FAILURES (CITY PLANNING, THE KUFRA PROJECT) WERE OPENLY ADMITTED BY QADHAFI, OFTEN AFTER A MINISTER HAD JUST DEFENDED THE SAME PROGRAMS. RCC MEMBERS ABU BAKR YUNIS, LT. COL. KHARRBUI, AND MINISTER OF INTERIOR KHUWAYLDI AL-HUMAYDI WERE PRESENT THROUGHOUT, AND WITH THE NOTIABLE EXECPTION OF KHARRRUBI, JOINED IN THE DEBATES. ON ONE OCCASION, FOR EXAMPLE, KHUWAYLDI AL-HUMAYDI AND QADHAFI DEBATED WHETHER A PARTICULAR ROAD SHOULD BE BUILT, AND THE DIALOGUE WENT SOMETHING LIKE THIS: MINISTER OF INTERIOR: "THERE ARE TOO MANY ACCIDENTS ON THAT ROAD, AND IT MUST BE IMPROVED." QADHAFI: "YOU ALWAYS WNAT MORE ROADS BUILT. MORE ROADS MEAN MORE ACCIDENTS".

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MINISTER OF INTERIOR: "YOU MIGHT AS WELL SAY CARS CAUSE ACCIDENTS. DO YOU WANT US TO GO BACK TO CAMELS?"

6. FOREIGN POLICY:

ALTHOUGH THE CONGRESS WAS OVERWHELMINGLY DEVOTED TO DISCUSSIONS OF ECONOMIC POLICY AND INTERNAL MATTERS (SEE SEPTTEL), QADHAFI DID BRING UP EXTERNAL POLICY ENOUGH TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT HIS BASIC THINKING HAS NOT CHANGED. HE CONDEMNED THE SINAI AGREEMENT ("SHAMEFUL FOR THE ARAB NATION") AND SAID THAT LIBYA WOULD GO ON SUPPORTING "LIBERATION MOVEMENTS". HE WANTED TO SPEND MORE TO SUPPORT "THE FAMILIES OF MARTYRS" IN LEBANON, AND MORE ON INTELLIGENCE (SEE TRIPOLI 18 NOTAL). HE REMAINED BENT ON UNITY WITH TUNISIA (TRIPOLI 45 NOTAL). HE WARNED DELGATES THAT THEY WERE FREE TO INCREASE DEVELOPMENT SPENDING, BUT WOULD DO SO AT THEIR PERIL, SINCE THIS WOULD CUT INTO THE DEFENSE BUDGET. THE ARMY HE SAID, NEEDED RECRUITS TO MAN THE NEW WEAPONS HE WOULD BUY OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS, AND WOULD TAKE AS MAY AS IT NEEDED FROM THE RANKS OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. HE WAS REALISTIC ABOUT EGYPT ("I HAVE BEGGED FOR UNITY ONE HUNDRED TIMES, ABASED MYSELF,AND GOT BACK INSULTS IN RETURN".) HE TOLD THE CONGRESS THAT LIBYA WOULD GO ON SUPPORTING THE POLISARIO FRONT AGAINST MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA, ALTHOUGH HE REVEALED THAT HE HAD TRIED TO MEDIATE THE

INTER-ARAB DISPUTE OVER THE SAHARA (TRIPOLI 46 NOTAL).
DURING THE CLOSED SESSION OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
QADHAFI READ TO THE CONGRESS A LIST OF
LOANS AND AGREEMENTS WITH FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS, A LIST
OF FINANCIAL AID TO "LIBERATION MOVEMENTS", AND A LIST OF
MILITARY AID TO LIBERATION MOVEMENTS. THE AMERICANS,
THE ISRAELIS, AND REACTIONARY ARAB REGIMES, QADHAFI SAID,
CLAIM THAT WE SUPPORT TERRORISTS WITH OUR OIL MONEY, WHILE
YOU ACCUSE US OF GIVING AWAY BAGFULS
OF MONEY TO EVERY VISITOR FROM BLACK AFRICA WHO COMES HERE.
(AS INDEED THEY DO). QADHAFI'S OWN OPINION ON THE MATTER,
WHICH HE PRESUMABLY RESTATED TO THE CLOSED SESSION, IS THAT
LIBYA IS THE "MOST MISERLY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD": THAT
IS, SUPPORT TO "LIBERATION MOVEMENTS" AND TO AFRICAN
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AND MUSLIM COUNTRIES SHOULD BE INCREASED, NOT DECREASED.
IN SHORT, ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS
THE CONGRESS DID NOT SIGNAL ANY CHANGE IN LIBYAN
ADVENTURISM ABROAD, ALTHOUGH IT DID SHOW QADHAFI'S
SENSITIVITY TO EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL CRITICISM ON
THIS ACCOUNT.

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7. THE POINT OF THE EXERCISE:

THE CONGRESS REPRESENTS AN ATTEMPT BY QADHAFI TO GIVE HIS DICTATORIAL RULE AN APPEARANCE OF LEGITIMACY AND CONSENSUS, WITHOUT, OF COURSE, GIVING AWAY ANY OF HIS POWER. QADHAFI IS AN ACCOMPLISHED ACTOR, AND HIS PERFORMANCE WAS SOMETIMES INSPIRED. HE HELD HIS AUDIENCE IN THRALL WHENEVER HE WANTED TO, AND HE PROJECTED THE IMAGE, NOT COMPLETELY FALSE, OF A THIRD WORLD LEADER WHO DOESN'T HAVE TO TALK ABOUT AUTHENTICITY BECAUSE HE EMBODIES IT. THIS IMAGE, AND THE CONFERENCE AS A WHOLE, WAS SERIOUSLY MARRED, HOWEVER, BY THE STUDENTS TROUBLES AT BENGHAZI UNIVERSITY WHICH ERUPTED, NOT COINCIDENTALLY, THE DAY BEFORE THE CONGRESS WAS TO BEGIN. IT GALLED QADHAFI THAT HIS SPECTACULAR PRODUCTION
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HAD BEEN UPSTAGED BY THE STUDENTS, AND HE SHOWED IT. SEVERAL TIMES DURING THE CONGRESS HE LAUNCHED INTO TIRADES OF FURIOUS AND UNCONTROLLED INVECTIVE AGAINST THE STUDENTS, AND AT SUCH TIMES HE WAS NOT THE PURE YOUNG IDEALIST HE SOMETIMES SEEMS TO BE, BUT THE DICTATOR MOST LIBYANS NOW KNOW HIM TO BE. HE DENIED THAT ANY DEATHS HAD OCCURRED IN BENGHAZI, ALTHOUGH IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT THERE WERE PEOPLE KILLED IN THE RIOTS, AND AT ANOTHER MOMENT HE SEEMS TO WELCOME THE "REVOLUTIONARY" VIOLENCE. HE TORE A TELEGRAM WHICH REPORTEDLY CAME FROM LAWYERS FOR ARRESTED BENGHAZI STUDENTS TO SHREDS IN FRONT OF THE CONGRESS.

8. EFFECT ON THE INTERNAL SITUATION:

DESPITE THE THEATRICALS, QADHAFI'S HOLD ON POWER IS UNCERTAIN, AND HE OFTEN SHOWED IT. AT ONE POINT HE DELIVERED A HOMILY ON THE NEED FOR STABILITY AS A BASIS FOR ECONOMIC PROGRES. LOOK AT IRAQ AND SYRIA, HE TOLD THE CONGRESS. THEY ARE STILL BACKWARD BECAUSE OF THE SUCCESSION OF COUP ATTEMPTS THERE IN THE 1960'S.

EVEN A COUP WHICH FAILS IS HARMFUL TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT; THE RECENT ATTEMPT IN LIBYA (THE MUHAYSHI PLOT) HAD BEEN A SET-BACK. THE MILITARY IN THE THIRD WORLD MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN "FASCIST" ATTEMPTS TO SEIZE POWER WITH THE BARREL OF A GUN, OR DOING THEIR DUTY AS PROFESSIONAL SOLDIERS. QADHAFI ALSO BETRAYED HIS CONCERN ABOUT HIS SHAKY HOLD ON POWER IN HIS CLOSING SPEECH TO THE CONGRESS. HE SOFTENED THE BITTER CRITICISM HE HAS BEEN MAKING OF THE COMMERCIAL ELITE SINCE THE MUHAYSHI AFFAIR, AND IN AN OBVIOUS ATTEMPT TO REASSURE MERCHANTS, HE UNDERLINED THE POINT THAT HIS REVOLUTION HAD NEVER BEEN VINDICTIVE, AND WAS NOT AIMED AT INDIVIDUALS. SOME PEOPLE HAD BEEN WORRIED ABOUT THE APPEARANCE OF NEW SOCIALIST MEASURES, BUT THERE WAS NO NEED FOR THIS; MERCHANTS SHOULD REALIZE THAT THEY HAD NEVER BEEN SO PROSPEROUS. THERE WERE NO BIG CAPITALISTS IN LIBYA, QADHAFI SAID, AND WHAT HE HAD MEANT BY "BOURGEOIS" WAS MORE A STATE OF MIND THAN A QUESTION OF WEALTH.

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9. IT IS HARD TO TELL WHAT EFFECT, IF ANY, THE CONGRESS HAS HAD ON OPINION IN THE ARMY. SOME SOLDIERS MAY BE NAIVE ENOUGH TO THINK THAT THE FRANK DEBATES AND OCCASIONAL ADMISSION OF FAILURE ARE PROOF THAT LIBYA IS A "DEMOCRATIC" SOCIETY, AS QADHAFI PROPAGANDA TRUMPETS AND SOME MAY HAVE BEEN APPEALED BY THE WILD ANTICS OF THE CIVILIANS. OTHERS WILL SHARE THE OPINION WHICH IS WIDESPREAD AMONG THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN THE URBAN AND COMMERCIAL CLASSES THAT THE CONGRESS WAS A RIDICULOUS PIECE OF THEATER WHICH WENT ON TOO LONG, AND A PRODIGIOUS AND IRRELEVANT WASTE OF TIME.

10. THIS WAS WELL ILLUSTRATED ON THE LAST REGULAR EVENING SESSION OF THE CONGRESS, WHICH SHOWED BOTH THE LENGTHS QADHAFI WAS PREPARED TO GO TO GET AN APPEARANCE OF CONSENSUS AND HIS SENSE OF THE ABSURD. AT ABOUT ONE A.M. AFTER HOURS OF AIMLESS DEBATE, QADHAFI FINALLY TOLD THE THOUSAND DELEGATES PRESENT THAT IF THEY HAD NO OBJECTION TO ANY LAWS ISSUED BY THE RCC SINCE HE TOOK POWER, THEY WERE FREE TO LEAVE. AFTER SOME SHOUTING, ALL BUT ABOUT FIFTY DELEGATES DID SO, BUT IT WAS APPARENT THAT THE LAST FIFTY WERE NOT GOING ANYWHERE UNTIL THEY HAD PUT THEIR GRIEVANCES BEFORE QADHAFI. PATIENTLY, QADHAFI LET EACH OF THEM SPEAK, AND THE NIGHT WORE ON, UNTIL IT WAS WELL AFTER THREE A.M.. DELEGATES DRONED ON ABOUT A DISPUTE OVER A WELL, THE DIFFICULTY OF MARRYING DAUGHTERS UNDER THE LEGAL AGE OF SIXTEEN, AND SIMILAR PROBLEMS, UNTIL A SINGLE DELEGATE

WAS LEFT IN THE HALL BEFORE QADHAFI AND THE CABINET MINISTERS
SITTING IN THE FRONT ROW. FINALLY EVEN HE GAVE UP,
AND QADHAFI LAUGHINGLY ADJORNED THE SESSION IN TRIUMPH. EVERYBODY,
DOWN TO THE LAST DELEGATE, HAD HIS CHANCE TO PUT HIS
CASE BEFORE "BROTHER MU'AMMAR"; SURELY THAT WAS REAL
DEMOCRACY IN ACTION.
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